

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

March 11, 1998

Dear _____:

I write to seek your support in obtaining Senate consent to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is the most comprehensive and detailed international treaty developed to date relating to the rights of women. The United States actively participated in the drafting of CEDAW and signed the treaty in 1980. Although the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of ratification in 1994, the Senate has not formally considered the treaty since that time.

The rights of women are an issue of global importance—and one that is integral to our foreign policy. The success of any government depends ultimately on ensuring that all its citizens can participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives. Too many societies continue to shunt women to the sidelines, limiting their access to education, health care, and economic opportunity. Moreover, violence against women remains a widespread problem. I think you would agree that, as we enter the next century, we must address these issues. CEDAW provides us with an effective tool for doing so.

I believe that the ratification of CEDAW is critical to our efforts to advance the status of women throughout the world. To date, 161 countries have ratified CEDAW, including all our European allies and most of our important trading partners. The United States is one of the few countries that has not. This impedes our efforts to ensure that women everywhere are treated fairly and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

As you know, U.S. state and federal law already provides strong protections for women and is largely consistent with the provisions of CEDAW. In 1994, the Administration submitted a detailed analysis of the consequences of CEDAW ratification for U.S. law. All concerns at that time were addressed by the small number of reservations, understandings, and declarations upon which the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the State Department agreed. These include an explicit understanding that the treaty does not create a right to an abortion.

Today, in celebration of International Women's Day, I am announcing that obtaining Senate advice and consent to the ratification of CEDAW is a top Administration priority during this session of Congress. I am also announcing my goal of having the full Senate act on CEDAW this year, which marks the 150th anniversary of the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York.

I would very much like to have your support in ratifying CEDAW and look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader; Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Telephone Remarks With Representative-Elect Lois Capps

March 11, 1998

President Clinton. Hello, Lois?

Representative-Elect Capps. Hello, Mr. President.

President Clinton. Oh, I didn't know you were on the phone. Congratulations.

Representative-Elect Capps. Well, thank you so much.

President Clinton. I'm so thrilled for you.

Representative-Elect Capps. It was a tremendous experience, and I owe a lot to all of the people who are listening.

President Clinton. Well, you made a great grassroots campaign, and I think you really persuaded people that you would be a strong, independent voice for them. And of course, we were all thrilled that you ran on the issues that I think are critical to the future of the country, on education and the Patient's Bill of Rights and the tobacco issue.

I'm just ecstatic. But I know how hard you worked, and you must be so proud today.

Representative-Elect Capps. I'm very proud and very grateful. It's an affirmation of Walter as well.

President Clinton. Certainly it was. It certainly was.

The Vice President is on the phone with me. I know he wants to say something.

Vice President Gore. I'll wait until Dick Gephardt goes. Go ahead, Dick.

Representative Richard A. Gephardt. Thank you, Al. I thank you, Mr. President, for having this call. And Lois, we all here in the House congratulate you on this wonderful victory. It's a real testimony to you and the kind of campaign you ran and the way you related to the issues that people really care about in your district—education, health care, pensions. We believe this campaign, your campaign, is the formula by which we will win the majority back in the House in 1998.

So, congratulations. God love you and your family. And you're going to carry on in the spirit of your dear, wonderful husband, Walter. And we look forward to having you here next week.

Representative-Elect Capps. Oh, thank you, Mr. Gephardt.

Representative Martin Frost. And Lois, this is Martin Frost. If I could just say a brief word, because Dick and I have to go vote in a minute—something you'll be doing very shortly—this was an extraordinary victory. In fact, we're watching you on television right now; we see you on CNN. The fact that you won by such a significant margin, the 53 to 45, the 13,000-vote margin, is more than any of us had hoped for. We knew you were a terrific candidate, but we were just overwhelmed with your victory. And everyone here is talking about it in the cloakrooms and in the halls and everywhere up here on the Hill today. It is the number one topic, and people can hardly wait for you to get here next week.

Representative-Elect Capps. Could I now say, this is all music, sweet music, to my ears. And I want to thank you, all of you, and that which you represent, for the support that you gave, actually, for the freedom that you all allowed us to have here to run a local

race. And that began in the very beginning, when I felt no undue pressure as a grieving widow to make a decision before I was ready to. And that carried through in the kind of support that you gave us here and the kind of interest you showed then and do show now and in kind of letting us take the lead and listen to what people on the central coast of California were telling us about what are their important issues.

And you remember, Mr. President, I said when—in the midst of the campaign when I heard the State of the Union speech, I said to someone with whom I was with, it sounded as though you were walking among the people here on the central coast with us. And that's how much this resonates here. The issues of child care, the issues of our local schools and health care and the economy staying strong and keeping Social Security solvent—these are the refrains that we have heard and responded to.

And I believe, you know, it's across party lines. It's what the mainstream of, I can tell you for sure, one district in California, the 22d, really has compelled me to carry to Washington. And I'm so thankful that now I can do that, having paid attention to them and able to listen and join in the conversation there that you all have going.

President Clinton. Well, thank you. You know, we've only got 68 days left.

Representative-Elect Capps. Okay.

President Clinton. We need you.

Representative-Elect Capps. We'd better get busy.

Vice President Gore. Lois, this is Al Gore.

Representative-Elect Capps. Hello.

Vice President Gore. This is Al Gore, Lois. And I also want to congratulate you on running a fantastic race. And it was about the issues that Americans really care about and the future of education, the environment, technology and schools, child care, the others that you mentioned. And we all look forward to working very closely with you on those issues and on improving the lives of the American people. And God bless your family and Walter's memory.

Representative-Elect Capps. Thank you.

Vice President Gore. And we miss Laura. She did a great job for you.

Representative-Elect Capps. Well, she has. She's coming back soon. She's excited to get back there, as well. And Mr. Gore, thank you. You just touched on all of the issues that we are going to be working on together.

Vice President Gore. Great. God bless.
President Clinton. Lois, we need you. We'll be glad when you get here.

Representative-Elect Capps. I'm hurrying up. We'll be there soon.

President Clinton. Give our love to Laura. I'll see you.

Representative-Elect Capps. Thank you so much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:57 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Representative-Elect Capps' daughter, Laura, who serves as Staff Director for the Office of Speechwriting at the White House. Lois Capps was elected Representative of California's 22d Congressional District in a special election on March 10, to succeed her husband, Representative Walter Capps, who died on October 28, 1997.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on the "African Growth and Opportunity Act"

March 11, 1998

In this year's State of the Union Address, I asked Congress to support an initiative to strengthen economic ties to Africa. Today, I am pleased that Congress has taken an important step forward on legislation that will open a new era of U.S.-African trade and investment relations. The strong bipartisan vote in the House in support of the "African Growth and Opportunity Act" offers the way for a brighter future for Africa.

The United States has a vital stake in a stable, prosperous Africa. Later this month, when I travel to Africa, I will deliver the message that the United States stands ready to be a partner in Africa's prosperity. A majority of sub-Saharan Africa's 48 countries have adopted market-oriented economic and political reforms in the past seven years. A stronger, stable, prosperous Africa will be a better economic partner, a better partner for

security and peace, and a better partner in the fight against the new transnational threats of drug trafficking, crime, terrorism, the spread of disease and environmental degradation. This bill—by significantly broadening market access, spurring growth in Africa, and helping the poorest nations eliminate or reduce their bilateral debt—would help African nations that are committed to undertake difficult economic reforms to build better lives for their people.

We have an historic opportunity to support the renaissance in Africa. I want to commend Speaker Gingrich, Chairman Archer, Congressman Rangel, Congressman McDermott, Congressman Crane, Chairman Gilman, Congressman Hamilton, Congressman Payne, Congresswoman McKinney, Congressman Jefferson, Congresswoman Jackson Lee, Congresswoman Waters, Congressman Royce, Congressman Menendez, and all those who have devoted themselves to helping that transformation. I look forward to working with the Senate to enact this landmark legislation as quickly as possible.

Remarks to the National Association of Attorneys General

March 12, 1998

Thank you very much, Attorney General Doyle. Attorney General Reno, thank you for joining us here today and for the work you have done with the States' attorneys general and local prosecutors on domestic violence and to reduce the crime rate and a whole host of other issues. I want to thank Fred Duval for the work he does on my behalf with you and this association. And I'd also like to thank the two former attorneys general that are working for me: Bonnie Campbell, who heads the Attorney General's effort on violence against women; and Chuck Burson, who was formerly president of NAAG, now the Vice President Counsel.

I've really been looking forward to coming over here today. I have had the opportunity to know and work with most of you personally, and I see some former attorneys general out in the audience who were my colleagues and friends. I thank them for being here.